

***What makes Citizen Review Panels successful?  
Research, Best Practices and Practical Advice***

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***“Never doubt that a small, dedicated group of citizens can make a difference. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has...”***

***~ Margaret Mead***





“The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach — no one is against it because it is good for you.”

*~Sherry Arnstein*

# *What I want to Accomplish for this Session*

 Discuss some “Helpful Hints” for making the CRP process work, including:

- > Recruitment and retention of members
- > Group dynamics
- > Writing a good recommendation
- > Defining/Tracking your “outcomes”
- > Building a positive relationship with CPS
- > Volunteer recruitment
- > The importance of strategic planning



# *Greetings from my Family*





# *Why is Citizen Participation in Public Child Welfare Important?*

- It prevents the child welfare agency from becoming a “**system unto itself**”
- It moves us toward “**community based**” **protection** of children (the BEST way!)
- Citizen can be **advocates** for the agency
- It educates *citizens* about **what is really happening** with child abuse and neglect
- It's **democracy** in action....



# *A Reminder of Why you Exist...*



- Citizen Review Panels were formed through a 1996 amendment to the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA)
- **3 panels** per state by July, 1999 (some only needed one)
- Each panel has the responsibility to review compliance of state and local CPS agencies with respect to:
  - state CAPTA **plan (basically ANY child protective services)**
  - Other criteria the panel considers important, which may include coordination with foster care and adoption programs and review of child fatalities and near fatalities



# *Requirements from 2003 CAPTA Reauthorization*

- Evaluate PRACTICES as well as policy and procedure
- Develop a means for public comment
- Child welfare agency is to respond in writing to annual report within six months





# *Requirements for Citizen Review Panels*

- Composed of volunteer members that
  - are **broadly representative** of the community in which they are operating
  - include individuals with **expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect**
- Meet at least **quarterly**
- Examine **policies and procedures** and, where appropriate, **specific cases** of both state and local agencies
- Maintain **confidentiality**
- Prepare an **annual report with activities and recommendations**



# ***Panels Can Examine Any of the Following Parts of the CPS System***

- Intake and initial screening
- Investigation and/or assessment
- Case determination
- Service planing, implementation, and monitoring
- Case closure
- Crisis intervention; Emergency placement; Family stabilization
- Coordination of services
- Staff qualifications, training and workload



# *HOW can a Panel Review these Things?*

- In-depth review of a small number of cases
- Broader review of cases
- Analysis of statewide data systems
- Review of agency policy and procedures
- Targeted Surveys
- Quality assurance reviews
- Community forums
- Focus groups or interviews of staff, consumers, service providers, mandated reporters, foster parents, others



# *The Kentucky Experience*





# Kentucky's Citizen Review Panels

- Two regional Panels (Louisville and Lexington areas)
- One Statewide Panel
- CAPTA money channeled through state agency to the University of Kentucky for: panel coordination, travel for members, food, training, etc.
- Meet monthly over lunch and have “working teams” which report at each meeting
- Have worked on issues of: communication between CPS/schools, children aging out of foster care, training of CPS workers, kinship care
- Always have a practicum student
- The “Call”.....



# *A Selection of CRP Successes Nationally*

- *Wyoming and Minnesota* CRPs are performing “mini-CFSR” reviews
- *Jefferson (KY)* Panel is developing a “flow chart” of their recommendations from the previous three years to determine what has happened to their recommendations
- *Alaska* has made a concentrated effort to impact their legislators, resulting in a significant financial benefit
- *Tennessee* CRP developed an online training for mandated reporters



# Common Themes

- CRP coordinated by someone from state child welfare agency
- Struggle with “diverse” membership and involving “non-professionals”
- Trouble in defining the “mission” and outcomes of CRP (“watchdog” vs. “advocate”)
- Retention of members is difficult
- Turnover in state agency (i.e., new administrations)
- Difficulty in connecting with Child and Family Services Review



# *How CRPs are funded*

- CAPTA says that states are to provide support for CRPs in order for them to do their job
- Budget could include money for travel, meals at meetings, special meetings, staff support, printing, consulting, training
- Wide range of financial support nationally (i.e., \$20,000 in Nebraska to \$180,000 in Wyoming)
- CRPs are funded through a variety of sources: CAPTA money, CJA, state allocated funds, funds from the Legislature





# *The Annual Report*

- The culmination of CRP work
- The “public record” of CRP work
- A great PR tool!
- Recommendations should be tracked over a period of time to determine their outcome/status



# Challenges to Collaboration

- Citizens have trouble understanding complexities of state agencies (“Feel like we’re treading water”)
- Difficulty in choosing evaluative topics of any substance and value
- CRPs get lost in the sea of “citizen groups” who are charged with evaluating CPS



# More obstacles...

- Distrust from frontline workers
- Overwhelming nature of NCANS, PIP, CFSR, etc.
- Time lag between when new initiatives are launched and CRPs are informed (“we had to read it in the paper...”)
- Some members see Panels as a way to “stick it to” the child protection system





# Ways for the Child Welfare Agency to Foster **Collaboration**



- Appoint consistent point persons as liaisons to your Panels (local AND state)
- CPS should HELP panels as they develop their strategic plan (**don't dictate**, but facilitate a doable plan)
- Give your panels frequent feedback about what is happening to their recommendations (use liaisons for this)
- Spend some time on response to the annual report and **EXPLAIN** it to the panels



# Ways to Share Information

- Develop a Memo of Agreement that spells out each partner's role
- Have joint meetings/celebrations to discuss progress and honestly dialogue about obstacles (remember the HUMAN element of groups)
- Make sure Program Coordinator is well-known by state agency staff (i.e., have them sit on agency committees)
- Have Panel members/coordinator put on listserves to received newsletters, etc.



# ***The Benefits of State Agencies Developing a Good Relationship with your CRPs***

- Citizens can ADVOCATE for you (i.e., testify before state legislators)
- Citizens see things that your agency does not
- You spend less energy being proactive than reactive
- Others are watching (feds, other states)
- It's the law.....



## *Research tells us that Citizen Review Panels generally do better when they are...*

- Given access to information
- Consulted EARLY in the policy development process
- Given FEEDBACK about their recommendations
- Provided staff and other logistical support
- Are part of a thoughtful, well-defined process rather than a “feel good” exercise



# *What Makes a “Bad” CRP?*

- Unclear or conflicting goals
- Poor leadership from chairperson
- No follow through on commitments
- “axe grinders”
- Lack of communication from child welfare agency
- “Policy overload”
- Membership turnover (always “starting from scratch”)





# *The Elements of Successful Citizen Review Panels*

- A clear focus and strategic plan
- A ***trusting relationship*** with the child welfare system
- Ability to view the “big picture” of incremental change within large bureaucracies
- Staff and other logistical support
- Ability to engage in ongoing dialogue (***this is more than “trading reports”***)
- Ability to connect with other child advocates in the state
- Meetings which are productive and move the group toward a common goal



# A word about having a good meeting



- Make sure everyone comes away from the meeting feeling it was **PRODUCTIVE**, or people will **NOT COME BACK**
- Get agenda and minutes to members before the meeting
- Make sure **ALL** members are heard (aka, beware the “blowhard”)
- Have time each meeting for working teams to touch base on their work, and give a report
- Invite frontline workers, legislators, foster parents, etc. to your meetings

# *How to Write a Good Recommendation*

- A Caveat: CRPs are part of a **larger** picture of system change (don't usually recommend changes which have not already been considered by someone)
- Make sure recommendations contain the following elements:



# Recommendations should be...



- Based on the work of the Panel (not someone's opinion or personal agenda)
- Linked to some form of evaluation (surveys, policy review, focus groups, etc)
- Something which is SPECIFIC (i.e., related to specific policy changes)
- Something that is feasible within the context of a bureaucracy





# *Examples of Recommendations Made*

- Minimum education for a CPS worker should be a Bachelor's degree in social work, psychology, education, etc. (NY)
- Do not use children as interpreters during CPS investigations (AZ)
- Develop an Ombudsman system through an independent agency (WV)
- More funding for child welfare system in order to hire more caseworkers in compliance with CWLA standards (OK)

# An Example of a Successful CRP Topic

- TOPIC: How frontline Kentucky child welfare workers are trained to respond to “meth” cases
- KY CRP reviewed policy, talked with frontline workers and supervisors, law enforcement, first responders
- RESULT: Changes in policy which made workers and children safer



# Opportunities for Utah's CRPs?



- How is the Safety Decision Making Model being implemented “on the ground”?
- Is the Transition to Adult Living program effective in supporting youth transitioning out of care?
- Are intakes consistent and based on reliable decision-making?
- Does alternative response work in better protecting children and making the system more efficient?

*Source: 2010-2014 Child and Family Services Plan*



# ***Working With Diverse Groups***

*Source: Brushy Fork Institute, Berea College, Berea, KY*





# Working with Volunteers

Source: Brushy Fork Institute, Berea College, Berea, KY

## DON'T

- Just sign people up. . .
- Recruit people to come to meetings . .
- Make new volunteers work alone.
- Just tell them what to do. . .
- Ask people what they want to do. . .
- Use them up and burn them out. . .
- Ignore their suggestions. . .
- Let them starve for appreciation. . .
- Assume volunteers can only be "workers". . .
- Assume you don't have time to train volunteers. . .

## DO

- Give them something to do!
- Recruit people to come to **activities!**
- Assign them a partner or put them on a team!
- Involve them in project planning!
- Ask them what they like to do!
- Keep expectations reasonable and keep adding new volunteers to share the work!
- Let them know you appreciate their input!
- Pay them with praise!
- Let them run projects or be trainers and coordinators for other volunteers!
- Consider whether you really have time to do it all by yourself



# *Recruiting New Members*

- Who is MISSING from your group?
- Think about what agencies often interact with Child Protective Services (law enforcement, mental health, teachers, faith community, day care centers)
- Develop a PLAN for recruitment (press releases, targeted letters, guest speaking at community groups, church bulletins, etc.)
- Remember WHY people volunteer: to make a difference. Don't waste their time



# Elected Officials

## Ways to get me to your meeting

- A personal invitation, visit or a phone call.
- Keep me informed of your issue.
- Send me copies of the minutes and agenda.
- Ask me for my input.
- Show me how the issue affects my district.

## What you'll miss if I don't come

- My advice/insight into local government.
- My knowledge of federal and state grants.
- Awareness of my stand on the issue and opportunity to hold me accountable for my stand.
- My support on the issue and my representation to other officials.



# Senior Citizens

## Ways to get me to your meeting

- A personal invitation, visit or phone call
- Provide transportation.
- Advertise your meeting at places I normally go.
- Promote the meeting as a way to be socially active.
- Meet in a handicapped accessible location.

## What you'll miss if I don't come:

- My time for volunteer service.
- My experience, talent and knowledge.
- My knowledge of the special needs of seniors.
- My contacts in the community.
- My knowledge of the community's history.





# Low Income People

## Ways to get me to your meeting

- A personal invitation, visit or phone call.
- Make me feel accepted, sincerely welcome me.
- Provide child care.
- Pair me up with someone I know who can offer moral support.
- Offer me a ride or hold the meeting in a close, convenient location.

## What you'll miss if I don't come:

- My perspective on how to manage on a tight budget.
- A chance to change the stereotype image that the poor are dirty and uneducated.
- An idea of what low income people really need.
- A hard-working dedicated committee member.



# The “Pearls”

- Attack the PROBLEM and not each other (or CPS)
- Keep an eye on your “group health”
- Stay focused on the main “outcome” of CRP: a **safer, healthier community**
- Make sure you are working with **manageable** and **specific** topics
- Spends lots of time tending to relationships and listening to each other
- **Celebrate Citizenship!**



# Selected References

## Full articles available at

[www.uky.edu/socialwork/crp](http://www.uky.edu/socialwork/crp)

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# *The Importance of Strategic Planning*



- The CAPTA law is large and vague, leading to confusion and discouragement
- CRPs should evaluate topics with “depth” rather than being “a mile wide and an inch deep”
- Try to choose topics that are important to your state agency (remember ***communication?***)
- As one CRP member said, “Why do I need to volunteer my valuable time if all we do is show up and tear down CPS?”





# SMART Indicators for your Topics

■ Specific

■ Measurable

■ Achievable

■ Realistic

■ Time Limited



# SWOT Analysis



**Strengths**

**Weaknesses**

**Opportunities**

**Threats**



# Strengths



**Strengths:** attributes of the organization that are helpful to achieving the objective.

**Example:** You have a BUDGET, you are written into state law, stable membership

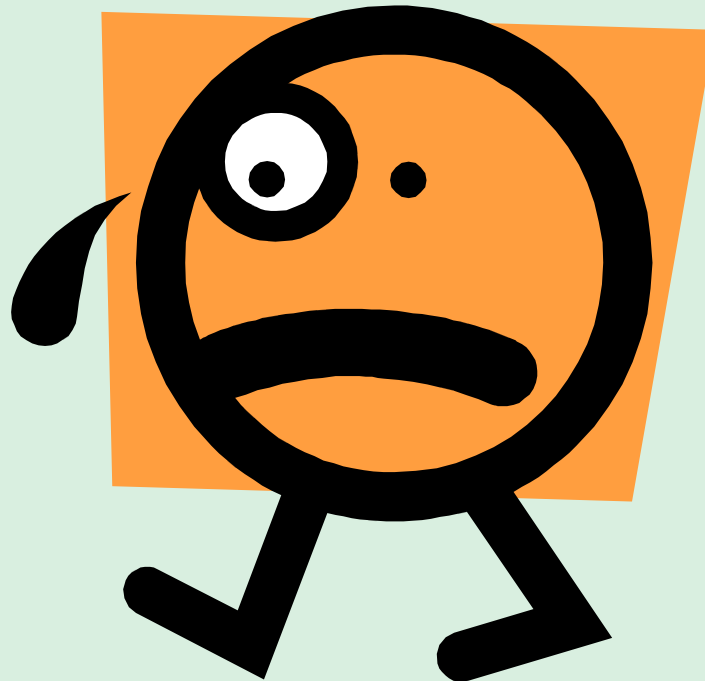


# Weaknesses



**Weaknesses:** attributes of the organization that are harmful to achieving the objective.

**Examples:** unstable membership, budget problems, poor leadership, goals are at cross purposes with agency





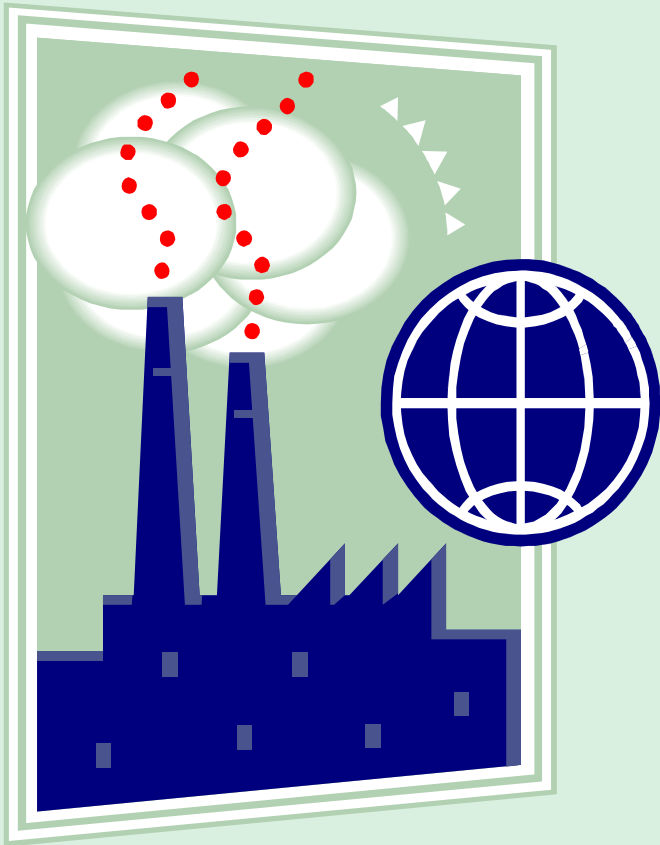
# Opportunities

■ **Opportunities:** *external* conditions that are helpful to achieving the objective.

**Examples:** Your state is getting ready to undergo its Child and Family Services Review



# Threats



■ Threats: *external* conditions that are harmful to achieving the objective.

**Examples:** State budget crises, adversarial relationship with child welfare agency



# *What are the ways you can...*

- **Capitalize** on Strengths

- **Minimize** weaknesses

- **Seize** Opportunities

- **Defend** against Threats



# *The national scene...*

- University of Kentucky is the organizing “hub” for Citizen Review Panels
- National Citizen Review Panel Virtual Community ([www.uky.edu/socialwork/crp](http://www.uky.edu/socialwork/crp))
  - \* Annual Reports
  - \* Training Materials
  - \* Sign up for Listserv
  - \* Information from Annual Reports
  - \* Articles, Tip Sheets
- National Study of CRPs is underway!
- National CRP Conference to be held May 26-28, 2010 in Lexington, KY







*“Children are the living messages we send  
to a time we will not see”.*

*~John W. Whitehead, “The Stealing of America”*

